



August 28, 1985

Dr. Harold E. Varmus
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Dear Dr. Varmus:

Thank you for requesting my views on the name of the retrovirus believed to cause AIDS. No matter what this virus is called, there will be some problems, and physicians will have to continue to educate, counsel and update patients about the significance of infection. This counselling must be an ongoing process both because of patients' concerns and changing knowledge about the significance of infection with the AIDS retrovirus. I doubt that any name that is chosen will completely eliminate doubts, anxiety and confusion. However, I think that it is preferable not to include "AIDS" in the name of the virus.

First of all, the AIDS retrovirus does not cause AIDS in all infected individuals. It may cause asymptomatic infection with no apparent disease, or a spectrum of illnesses including persistent generalized lymphadenopathy, idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura, encephalopathy, subclinical abnormalities of immune function testing or full-blown acquired immune deficiency syndrome. It is inaccurate to say that this virus only causes AIDS.

Historically, the first report of isolation of the AIDS retrovirus was not from an AIDS patient, but from a patient with lymphadenopathy. Most current names for this virus (LAV, HTLV-III) do not include the word AIDS.

I don't think that the word "AIDS" needs to be avoided at all costs, since the association of AIDS with the virus will be known to most people, and will have to be explained to the individual. I think it is preferable to exclude it, however, because this may be somewhat less anxiety provoking. Individuals will get some psychological comfort out of not carrying an "AIDS" tag. In addition, use of the word "AIDS" may compound the difficulties of infected individuals or individuals in high risk groups in obtaining insurance, employment and housing.

I hope these views are helpful to you. Thank you for not asking my opinion about what the virus should be called!

Yours truly,

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